

The authors demonstrated that if there had been access to and synthesis of all the research data, the trial disaster and consequent harm to the research volunteers could have been avoided.

Systematic reviews would tell us more about confounding variables and other characteristics of animal research that need to be accounted for (e.g. genetics, species differences, variations in feeding, location and laboratory practice),⁵ the validity of animal models and whether a rigorous search for alternatives had been conducted.

We are petitioning⁶ the Prime Minister to make improvements to animal research which would have relevance for 'a systematic study of the use of animal models'.

It is time that animal research was made more evidence-based.

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Medical progress and animal models: the importance of evidence

Robert Matthews chastises the scientific community for allegedly endorsing the unequivocal statement that 'virtually every medical achievement of the last century has depended directly or indirectly on research with animals' (*JRSM* 2008;**101**:95–8).¹ His central claim is that this one statement has acquired almost 'talismanic importance', receives 'unqualified support', and is 'routinely trotted out' by many eminent bodies. This is untrue.

Matthews gives no real evidence to support his allegation. His suggestion that over 500 eminent academics 'signed a public petition supporting the statement' in 2005 is disingenuous. That RDS Declaration² contained four statements on the medical benefits of animal research, of

which the last was a passing reference to the statement Matthews objects to. There were six other statements relating to ethics, animal welfare and the need for informed debate, as well as the need to develop alternatives to animal techniques.

We have analysed the public statements of the 36 most eminent scientific and medical organizations in the UK about the importance of animal research. Just one uses this statement, the Royal Society, from which it originated.

Animal research is morally and scientifically defensible whether it has contributed to some, many or virtually all medical advances of the last century.³ Pointless and pedantic point-scoring from Matthews does nothing to advance the debate, especially when it is incorrect. Those who preach the value of evidence should practise what they preach.

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